

VILA RECÔNCAVO

[Class A Families]

*565

596

527

262

[272]

*

565

596

527

[546]

[535]

[492]

[493]

*565

574

423

178

428

All these dishes are served with rice, potatoes, farina, and cooked vegetable salads. Then fruits are served, followed by a series of desserts including puddings, ice cream, and cakes. The meal is concluded with a demitasse (cafézinho). Lunch is usually served at midday, and afterwards the guests generally break into small groups, talk, sleep, play cards, or stroll about the garden. In midafternoon a small merenda (snack) is served for those who want it, consisting of cake and demitasse, and in the evening ceia (supper) is served, including cold cuts, salads, and dessert. After this the group may go en masse to the movies, either at the Petroleum Camp or in the town of Vila Recôncavo. Or, if in gay spirits, they may spend the evening dancing in the living room to popular records. People go to these almôços by horseback, jeep, truck, or sometimes, in a spirit of fun, by oxcart. Hospitality has for hundreds of years been the tradition of the rural landowners, who envelop guests with an overabundance of everything. One planter always has the dining-room table set for at least ten people, although only he and his wife live in the house. Others have the reputation of always providing a good meal for anyone who passes at mealtime.

The decreasing size of families, the shift in individual employment from agriculture to the professions, and this century's change to large-scale industrial holdings for the production of sugar have caused some differences in land tenure and, hence, inheritance. The Recôncavo is not an area in which land title was ever vague or lost as was often the case in the sertão. Land was always scarce here, for the desirable massapé soils are limited in extent. The plantations of today for the most part fall into one of two categories: those which have been in the hands of one family for a century or more, and those which were bought after the abolition of slavery by newcomers to the Recôncavo or by those who already had plantations and at a time of falling value bought new ones from the creditors who had taken them over from their former owners for debt. In both cases title passed free and clear. The common form of inheritance is for one half of the estate to go to the widow and the other half to be divided among other heirs.

A century ago, it was common for plantation masters to have extensive holdings, not only in the Recôncavo, but also in other parts of the state, as well as houses and even commercial buildings in the city of Salvador. In addition to this,

178

• 42

VILA RECÔNCAVO

[Class A Families]

[Class B Families]

such families also usually had fairly extensive accumulations of silver service, china and crystal, and linens. It was the custom for such possessions to be distributed among the heirs as separate items. One son would receive a plantation in the Recôncavo, another a ranch in the sertão; a daughter might receive a full and valuable set of table service, or perhaps a whole house and its furnishings in Salvador. Single plantations were almost never divided, unless they were large enough to make such a division practicable. Property divisions were often made rather arbitrarily by the family patriarch, and were often bitterly disputed by the heirs after his death. Slaves were also part of the property divided, although it was not infrequent that certain favorite slaves were freed at such a time. In other cases, the favorite slave of a son or daughter would be willed to him by the father. Through inheritances and constant divisions, the former large holdings of these aristocratic families came to be well broken up.

Today in the event of a death in a family, there is often only one plantation in which the heirs may share. However, the plantation is rarely divided. In some cases where there is no strong emotional tie to the plantation, the heirs may sell it outright and share the proceeds. Another solution has been to rent the plantation to a factory and thereby delay the final solution. Still another has been for one of the heirs to take over the management of the plantation, paying a rental fee to the other heirs. A final solution is often reached by allowing one of the heirs to purchase the plantation from his coinheritors, and in this way the plantation and its traditions remain in the family, and are to some extent shared by all members of the extended family.

The problem of land disposal exists only for the private plantation. In the case of factory lands, ownership is corporate. Death of the holder of shares in the corporation does not affect the land tenure, which goes on as before. His shares in the corporation are simply distributed among his heirs.

The family pattern in Class B is quite different from that which has just been described. Although the conjugal family is equally small and shows the same trend toward diminution, there is never the extent or strength of the extended family which exists in Class A. In Vila Recôncavo, with only one exception, Class B families are only conjugal units without local tradition of generations in the area, for either they are couples who have recently come to the town in governmental

178
42042
473565
594
[596]
[184]